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Special Features
Date 27 May 1991

BRINGING THE U.S. SPY NETWORK IN FROM THE COLD
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The CIA is about to get a new director.

President Bush i nominating Robert M. Gates as intelligence czar to replace William Webster.

Currently one of the president's national security advisers, Gates' career roots are in the CIA.

The agency recruited him in 1966; Gates has served as deputy to former CIA chiefs William Casey and Webster.

Hopefully, if Gates' nomination is confirmed, he will spend some of the estimated $30 billion a year Americans pay for their intelligence on what is known as ``human intelligence'' bureaucratic shorthand for ``spies.''

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The CIA had a pretty good spy apparatus until 1977, when a new director under the administration of former President Jimmy Carter, Admiral Stansfield Turner, began dismantling it.

Turner was enamored of technical intelligence and viewed spies as anachronistic.

Electronic intercepts and satellites were getting so good they could tell him when a Politburo member went to the bathroom in the Kremlin. They could even pinpoint the bathroom's location.

Unfortunately, the high-tech gimmickry could not tell him what the Soviet official was pondering while he was in there. To get inside the head of foreign leaders, the United States still needed spies and foreign agents.

But under Turner large numbers of intelligence operatives were turned out into the cold.

The United States shifted its intelligence gathering to technocrats. Contact was lost with the legion of foreign nationals who had been inside agents for the U.S. spies.

The results were predictable.

Dramatic events such as the fall of the Shah of Iran, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and most recently the bizarre behavior of Saddam Hussein in the prelude to his invasion of Kuwait caught us unaware.

Technical intelligence, for all its unquestionable value in telling us what was happening, could not tell us what was going to happen.

It is time to focus more attention on the human dimension of intelligence.

This is particularly true now that the Soviet Union has receded as a threat. The new threat resides in the uncertainties of the

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Third World and the danger of regional and ethnic disorder.

Technical intelligence is of limited value in dealing with problems such as the breakup of Yugoslavia or civil war in Sudan or Somalia. What is needed is knowledge of the individuals and institutions that will shape events. To satisfy this need, humans must know and interpret the behavior of other humans.

While this is important on the geopolitical and economic sphere, it is also true for military intelligence. Here also we have been deficient in human intelligence.

Despite the extraordinary technical intelligence the allies had available to them during the gulf war with Iraq, there were glaring intelligence deficiencies.

The ancient Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu _ in his classic treatise ``The Art of War'' _ admonished those who would command victory to know their enemy.

Sadly, in Iraq we knew much of what the enemy had in the way of equipment and where it was located, but we did not really know the enemy, much less what he would do.

How else does one explain the Pentagon's gross overestimation of the size of the Iraqi army in Kuwait? How, also, does one explain the uncertainty over how hard the Iraqis would fight?

The head Pentagon intelligence analyst for the Middle East Walter P. Lang, one of the few who correctly concluded from satellite photography that Saddam would invade Kuwait, was by the same token dead wrong about how well the Iraqi army would fight against the allies.

According to Bob Woodward's book ``The Commanders'' (Simon & Schuster, 1991), Lang told the president a week before the war that the Iraqis would not back away and that they would fight skillfully and hard.

Had adequate human intelligence collectors been at work, Lang might have learned that the Iraqi military leadership had already lost the war psychologically.

In the face of the overwhelming force mustered against them, it is now apparent that the Iraqi military had thrown in the towel even before the American tanks began to roll against them.

He might also have learned that nobody in the Iraqi high command dared to challenge Saddam over the fix into which he had gotten Iraq and the army.

To this date the number of Iraqi civilian and military casualties remains an intelligence question mark. The figures range from a high of 100,000 to less than 10,000, depending upon who gives the estimate.

The intelligence community may have a reliable figure, but that is doubtful. The best they seem to be able to do is extrapolate from data drawn from technical sources.

During the war Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell said he was not interested in body counts _ in other words,

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the raw, cold, statistical data of combat.

That was an acceptable view while the fighting was going on, but in assessing the gains vs. costs of the war now that it is over, it would be worthwhile to know what price the Iraqis paid in blood for their misadventure.

Fortunately, the gaps in intelligence during the war turned out to be of little consequence because we overestimated the enemy.

For example, intelligence sources told the U.S. Marines that they faced 230,000 Iraqis in their sector of the front.

One of the Iraqi units they faced had been posted on intelligence maps for almost six months. It was identified as the 80th Mechanized Brigade.

As it turned out there were 70,000 Iraqis confronting the Marines and the 80th brigade did not exist.

But suppose it was the other way around and we underestimated the enemy because of our overreliance on exotic technology and lack of human intelligence.

Many of the returning troops we hail as heroes today might have come home as dead heroes.

When the new overseer of intelligence takes his post he should think about that.